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Inside the Mind of *The Memory of Water* Student Director

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan senior theatre arts student Kristyn Kuzniar has learned that it may require exploring a variety of interests before finding the right career match. Entering Wesleyan as a theatre performing arts major, switching to costume design and finally settling on a focus in directing, Kuzniar discovered the perfect “fit.” She has been on a journey that has led to one of the greatest accomplishments of her college career.

Having excelled in a directing class offered through the Theatre Arts Department, Kuzniar was recommended by her professor to apply for the position of student director for the 2012 production season, which would result in directing a show for the E. Melba Johnson Kirkpatrick Laboratory Theatre. According to Kuzniar, trusting herself has posed the greatest challenge.

“Coming into this production, I didn’t have any directing experience outside of my class. I’ve really had to learn to believe in myself and my decisions throughout this entire process,” she said.

Kuzniar chose to direct *The Memory of Water* by Shelagh Stephenson. After having been introduced to the piece while studying abroad in London, she said she wanted to utilize what she’d learned about British culture.

The play contains both tragic and comedic elements as it centers on three sisters who are brought together by their mother’s funeral. As each sister reflects on the past, memories become prevalent in defining their identities and allowing them renewed perspectives on their lives.

“I find British humor to be very unique in that they often find comedy in tragic situations. Furthermore, I thought the story was extremely relatable, and I’m really drawn to theatre that everyone can connect to in some way,” she said.

To begin preparing for the show, Kuzniar explained that she found inspiration from a variety of sources, including photographs, television, and even her own family.

“While my sister and I were talking about our mother, I noticed how much my own life relates to this play. I’ll even find myself saying lines from the show when I’m talking with my family. I think this personal connection really drew me to the story,” she said.

Additionally, Kuzniar became very familiar with the characters and developed a clear concept of what she felt served as the message of the play. However, she soon learned that her ideas did not always develop as planned.

“Our first week of rehearsal we read through the play and discussed everyone’s opinions. I came into the process with my own ideas, but soon became challenged and inspired by the cast members’ interpretations. As a director, you need to have strong decisions, but I think learning to compromise and be adaptable is one of the most important aspects of directing,” she said.

As a director, Kuzniar said she aims to develop a fluid concept of the production by guiding and pushing her actors while working with the designers to construct one coherent vision. She feels her wide experience in the varying aspects of theatre has been essential in achieving this goal.



Kristyn Kuzniar '13 on the set of The Memory of Water.

"Having a background in acting allowed me see the process from the actors' perspective. My additional experience in design was extremely useful in knowing what works onstage for costuming, and in working with the other production designers," Kuzniar said.

In her hopes for the future, Kuzniar believes she will continue to pursue directing after graduation.

"Having worked in so many aspects of theatre, I've found that I feel most comfortable sitting in rehearsal with a script in my hand, observing and working with the actors. Every day, I walk away feeling amazed and inspired."

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